Kleindienst, Rockefeller Plans Branded as Madness by Clark

By William Claiborne
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Former Attorney General Ramsey Clark yesterday branded as examples of "utter madness" last week's advocacy by the current attorney general, Richard G. Kleindienst, that the death penalty be restored for certain crimes, and a proposal by New York Gov. Nelson A. Rockefeller that mandatory life sentences be handed to narcotics peddlers and violent addicts.

In an opening address to a national assembly on legal justice, which convened here for a week-long series of hearings, Clark was sharply critical of what he termed "constant violence and (prison) segregation as problem-solvers."

"Americans will renounce violence and segregation (of offenders) or it will fall victim to the inhumanity that it will create. It's not going to be the club, the gun, the iron bar and the stone walls that solve this (criminal justice) problem . . . It will be character," said Clark.

The nation's criminal justice system, Clark said, has been "characterized by neglect, through and through," beginning with the police, extending through the courts and ending with the state and federal penal systems.

Clark assailed what he termed a prevailing "paramilitary concept" of police functions and urged a restructuring of the traditional law enforcement institutions.

"The police must conceive of themselves as civil servants . . . as working for the people and being of the people," the former attorney general said.

Of prisons, Clark said, "We are manufacturing crime and we know it. More addicts are walking out of prisons than going in." He urged that confinement be used only as a "last resort," and that, instead, community-based correctional programs be expanded to rehabilitate offenders.

Citing Gov. Rockefeller's proposal for mandatory life terms—without parole—for narcotics sellers, Clark said, "It reflects an utter madness of a society that doesn't understand." He applied the same condemnation to Kleindienst's proposal of death sentences for persons convicted of crimes such as hijacking airplanes, assassinations bombing building and killing prison guards.

The national assembly, which will resume at 9:30 a.m. today at Georgetown University's Gaston Hall, is being sponsored by the National Coordinating Committee for Justice Under Law (NCCJL), a Washington-based legal reform group.

Cosponsors are the congressional Black Caucus, the National Council on Crime and Delinquency and the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employes (AFL-CIO). Rep. John Conyers Jr. (D-Mich.) is chairman of the panel.

The NCCJL complained yesterday that representatives of the U.S. Parole Board and the U.S. Bureau of Prisons rejected invitations to attend the hearings because ex-inmates are on the panel.

Calling the rejections part of a "boycott," Conyers said, "The word is out that no member of the executive branch will participate."

The hearings today will include testimony by two Detroit judges, a black Chicago police association official, a New York City judge, Addison Bowman, codirector of the Georgetown legal intern program, and D.C. Superior Court Judge Harry Alexander.